LETTERS FROM CUBA

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By Michele Clark

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LIBERATION NEWS SERVICE

New York City

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FROM THE EDITORS OF LNS. This packet contains a 12-part Cuban journal, in the form of letters, written by Michele Clark. Michele travelled to Cuba in September for LNS on an SDS trip, at the invitation of the Cuban government. You will find that most, if not all, of the letters stand up as separate essays. Feel free to change the format, but please don't forget to credit Michele and LIBERATION News Service. Her own note to you follows.

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A NOTE TO EDITORS AND OTHERS. The 12 letters from Cuba in this packet were written since I got back to the States from notes and half-letters I wrote while I was there. I have tried, as much as possible, to make them newspaper length and to divide them into roughly separate topics, though there's lots of overlap, inevitably, when you are dealing with a whole society. If, by any chance, you decide to publish all of them, you'll notice that things are repeated -- identifications of people and places -- so that each could stand alone; repetitions (they are usually no more than one sentence) should be edited out.

The people who went on the trip hope to prepare a pamphlet of essays which will cover such thing as: economic structure, the role of the artist, system of education, Cuban marxism and lots more. So this journal is pretty much a subjective account of the trip, talking a lot about Cuba's relevance to the U.S., our reactions as "first world" norteamericanos, etc. Of course you can't talk about Cuba unless you include certain facts and figures and historical discussions. But these are not, I think, the bulk of what I've written.

Anyway I hope you dig them and/or find them useful. Claude Levi-Strauss says something in Tristes Tropiques which pertains very much to the excitement that is Cuba.

"... the great manifestations of Society have this in common with the work of art: that they originate at the level of unconscious existence -- because they are collective, in the first case, and although they are individual, in the second; but the difference is not of real importance -- is, indeed, no more apparent -- because the first is produced by, and the second for, the public, and the public supplies them both with their common denominator and determines the conditions in which they shall be created."

love in struggle and rhetoric,
michele clark

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CORRECTION. Please omit the following sentence from the article, "The US and Education in the Dominican Republic" (packet #123). "The program includes a strong emphasis on the English language and the teachers are being schooled in the glories of US foreign policy, no doubt for the benefit of their future pupils." (in para #5) Also, the byline should read, "Based on research by Ruth Sherett." Thanks.

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HIPS: Tom, Karen, Tom, Dave, Jon, Harold, Robby

14 shoplifting days 'til christmas.

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LETTER ONE
Midnight
Washington, D C

Dear Joel,

Yesterday I thought for sure the trip was cancelled. Today it's on again. I doubt very much, though, that we will ever reach Cuba. At least I'll be able to turn in a first-hand, human interest report on life in a Mexican prison.

In the past two weeks a group of Panthers and a separate group of Lawyer's Guild folk, both on their way to Cuba, were arrested by Mexican authorities, held 72 hours incommunicado and then escorted to airplanes heading for the States. People from the West Coast landed in Wichita and vice versa. With any luck, I will realize my lifelong dream to visit Helena, Montana.

We expect, you see, the same treatment. We'll be arriving in Mexico City the day before a massive student and workers' march. Something like 50 people have already been killed. However, the word from the Cuban folks in New York is, "We'll do our best but you go at your own risk" --so we have decided to try it.

Once -- remember -- I used to think of myself as A Writer. Capital A, Capital W. Now my mind is so fragmented and my life, my perceptions, my non-structures, that I find it impossible to isolate one thing and write about it. Lucky Marc Sommer from the S Street co-op, where I live, talks about writing a story about "the closing off of feeling" or "falling in love." But I can't separate anything out -- either verbally or substantively. Am self-conscious all the time. (Dig that word, no less substantively!) So I don't think I am A Writer any more, but am going to try, anyway, to keep a conscientious journal of the thing -- if we make it -- for the sake of my, ahem, constituency (Or do I mean comrades?)

My paranoia: I await the day that I fuck up something, some responsibility so badly that no one trusts me or wants me anymore.

I am afraid that at some point I will have a project to do in the movement and will do it so badly or not be able to do it at all, that people will say: "Oh, Michele -- well, we wouldn't ask her -- she screwed up on the last project." So I feel extremely pressed to be very responsible and responsive. To bring people back enough information goodies, to be able to speak to people about what socialism is like. To bring back a well-wrought journal. And if I'm lucky, a bit of newly ionized consciousness.

There will be 37 of us going, from all over the country, plus Chevara Lynn Orrin, Sue Orrin's five-month-old daughter. Too large a group. Everyone laughs when I tell them I'm going with 37 other people and taunts me with panoramas of flower shirted American tourists. "And there's mother in front of the Grand Coulie Dam!" Hopefully, probably, we'll travel around in small groups.

Cuba. Rick Margolies, another member of the S Street co-op, asks: "Why are you people so interested in Cuba and not Yugoslavia?" He asks this pointedly and means -- oh, you people (me) are entranced by the romance of revolution, by Che, by the guerrillas -- but you're not really serious, because if you were, you'd study Yugoslavia's technological decentralization. Yugoslavia, he says, is much more similar to the U S than Cuba is.

He's right, I suppose. I grant him immediately the accusation that many SDS people are too "entranced" by violence, the revolutionary stance, the mouthing of slogans, the ego-trip of it all. I give in to it sometimes myself, though I'm aware of the stance and try to avoid it, avoid believing it. But then, you might say, this is one of the questions I am asking of the trip, of Cuba. What does the third world, realistically, mean to me? Since I'm not about to become a mountain fighter or even an urban guerrilla (at least not for the next few years), what is the meaning of Che or Debray or any of it, for me?

But I haven't answered Rick's question. For one thing, Cuba is the only socialist country nearby. Yugoslavia is far away and expensive to

visit. If you are interested in what socialism/communism is like and don't have much money -- see Cuba. (Si! Cuba!) Second there is the romance of a new revolution -- a revolution which was possible and then succeeded. Where people are mentally and spiritually recreating themselves in their own image. Third I do not think that a revolution in the USA could use Cuba as a model -- so I'm not looking for that -- for a model for North America. I am looking for the mental changes, I suppose, the personal changes people have undergone -- if I can find that in a month. I suppose the romance is a lot of it -- but then, I think I am wary enough and won't be sucked in.

Paranoia #2: Encapsulated in the phrase, running over and around in my heard this past week: "I want to be there when the shit falls." Do you know this trip -- if we arrive -- will be my first overtly illegal act? I've been in and around the Movement about four years now but I've never been arrested, never participated in anything harmful, actively harmful to el capitalismo. A sit-in, a riot -- never even held any position in any organization that would make me vulnerable to attack, or rather to some societal after-effects: losing a job, something on my record, etc. I'm not very much afraid of these kind of things. Am mostly afraid of being alone. Of finding myself in jail and alone. But anyway, the projects I've worked on have not led me into any dangerous situations. I have yet to see a fist fight or cops beating people bloody. I'm still kind of an ingenue, yet very much part of the movement. My actions, thought, decisions, friends, lovers, et cetera.

So there's a lingering fear/trepidation that somehow I will always be able to avoid confrontation. Personal confrontation. That I will always be satisfied with symbols and symbolic confrontation. That I will never take on, have the courage to take on, a lot of responsibility.

Do you know what I mean? I mean that I doubt myself. That when and if the shit fell on my friends, would I want to escape it? Would it be that I would never have taken an obvious and strong enough position to be counted? And like the innermost recess of the bourgeois mind, would I then breathe a sigh of relief: that now that the shit/repression was upon us, I could somehow, quiet as a mouse, a mole, a flea escape. So I'm afraid of consequences and I'm afraid of avoiding them.

It's a question and it seems important to me. I don't know how many people think this way. Few, I would imagine. But I have never talked it out with anyone so I don't know.

It might also be that the community which comprises the Movement is the only real community I will ever know, here in fragmented America. And if this community -- made up of those I love and work beside -- were to be destroyed, I would want to be destroyed with it. And if I were not, I would feel that I had betrayed those who have shared, do share, will share, everything with me. The beloved community is what we all crave. Even my parents, who find it in Judaism where I no longer fit. Even your mother, a renegade Catholic dabbling in the waters of Jehavoah's Witnesses.

The difference is, however, that us commies want everyone to have a community, and see ours as a means to that end. See ours as unsafe, unsound and in a way, impossible, while we are alienated and living under capitalism, the rule of property and the few who own it. This is another long dialogue Rick and I have from time to time. He thinks it's possible to drop out, build your own society, always involving others, but separating yourself from capitalism, materialism and egoism. Bullshit. But I can't yet explain to him why this seems to clearly impossible to me. This utopian communitarianism. And that's another question I want to ask of Cuba: the great U.S. movement battles might be Henry David Thoreau versus -- in this corner of the ring, weighing 175 pounds with beard, Karl Marx.

There is a point on the cosmic and earthly graphs where individuality and community intersect -- that is what we strive for. And then, sometimes, as I notice my mind becoming more and more Marxist, political, I notice too that the rest

of the country is not picking up and following after. I wonder is this revolutionary rhetoric only rhetoric? It is only a gran falloon? A delusion we use to gain some warmth from each other? Sometimes I think like that. I used to argue it as a position against the Movement. Lately I only argue the opposite.

I will see you in a week or a month.

Venceremos and love

Michele

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LETTER TWO
Santiago de Cuba
Oriente Province
Motel Versailles

Dear Joel

As it turns out I can send letters from Cuba to the States. Though this will probably take six weeks to reach you and I will be home by then. So I don t know quite why I'm writing - because I can t imagine what I will be able to tell you in a measly letter. Cuba is 850 miles long and vast as two planets. Ninety miles from Florida, but might as well be the remotest mountain in Yangtze province. News of the States is sporadic and not very accurate and tropical socialism is not quite the same as life in Washington D.C. Not at all.

This is the first opportunity I've had to write in over a week. Pardon me if I begin with complaints. This week has been like that infinitely repeating children s song: "The bear went over the mountain" -- only in Cuba, a tourist might sing "The bear went over the factory..." We have spent the past seven days on long bumpy bus rides with periodic runs to the bathroom along the way for various degrees of diarrhea, nausea, and demoralization. Herded around, all 37 of us from cement factory to fertilizer plant sugar field to artificial insemination ranch ("Every cow a mother" is their motto) dam to river pig farm to modernized chicken coop. We spend two hours on every meal, hours upon hours on the bus. Everyone hates everyone else, pretty much and our guides are disgusted because we are always asleep or late for a meal.

We spent the first week at a youth hostel outside Havana. From the beach you could see one of the U.S. spy ships. We made daily forays into the city and the surrounding countryside. University students and some economists were invited out to speak with us.

Now that we are on the road, we are more free. At night, we arrive at a hotel, have dinner and then roam the city without guides until two or three in the morning, talking with whomever we meet -- people queueing up from the stores to open in the morning, soldiers on leave, students etc. About six people in the group speak fluent Spanish and we also have six Cuban guides. A lot of us, including myself, know enough to get by and we are learning quickly. Needless to say, the people who are fluent are very much in demand.

This little island. Ninety miles from Miami. No wonder los Americanos thought it was just a drop of their very own personal imperialist spittle. I'm amazed at how little I knew before I came. We used to get Granma at the Liberation News Service office, but I never read it very closely. There was so much else to read in the office -- and we were always over-worked and harried. Besides, I didn't know anything about the over-all economic picture -- so any particular article or speech I read was just another fact-fragment. A little more mind-garbage.

But I'm learning fast. Almost anyone you talk to here -- worker, engineer, teacher, student -- knows the economic situation of the country. Will give you a rap, in five minutes on under-development, the sugar harvest, the price of sugar the world market, the diversification of agriculture.

Where did they learn all this? From Fidel s speeches. His speeches are incredible. They're filled with facts. Statistics; how much we've grown; how much we must still grow; why we are building schools rather than a shoe factory. "Subdesarrollo" which means "underdevelopment" is a household world. Every citizen an economist. Every man and woamn understands his importance

in the overall picture.

Best anecdote so far: Yesterday Mark Shapiro, a white working class organizer from Detroit and pink diaper baby, asked a party official at San German Sugan Mill: "Are workers allowed to strike?"

"Strike against whom," responded the Party member.

We were outdoors. It was lunchtime and a group of workers from the mill were crowded around us, listening. It was about to rain. The sky kept getting darker. The trees whistled.

"Theoretically, I mean," said Mark. "Could they strike if they wanted to. If the grievance process broke down. Theoretically."

"Theoretically what?" said the Party man, who was, by the way, also a worker. He sold bread door to door before the revolution and presently he makes the same salary as a worker, but has more responsibilities. Party members are elected by the whole body of workers. Elected because they are exemplary workers and communitarians. If he stops being an exemplary worker, the rest of the plant can remove him from office.

"What kind of theory?" he asked again. Our guides were embarrassed. The sky got darker and the workers crowded closer.

The communications gap continued another minute or two. Everything getting darker and angrier. Finally the Party man said, "Why don't you ask them if they want to strike."

"All right," said Mark.

And one of our guides, in Spanish, said to the large group of men standing around us, "This companero wants to know if you have the right to strike. If you would like to strike."

"Strike?" shouted one worker. "Strike against whom? We are the bosses! We work for the Cuban people."

"Strike?" shouted another. "Yes, we want to strike. Strike against imperialism."

We thought Mark would be lynched. But everyone started to laugh and Mark said, "That's what I was hoping to hear," and began clapping his hands.

Me, I was ignorant before I came here. I had no idea, for instance, of the extent of the U.S. blockade. Any ship which the U.S. Coast Guard spots on its way to Cuba is not allowed to dock in an American port -- ever. Dig it. There is no country in this hemisphere which trades with Cuba. Not one. (Though as I write this, I think Canada might be the one exception -- I'm not sure). Cuba bought Leyland buses from England and they can no longer purchase parts for the buses, because the company was bought out by an American firm. Incredible. Consumer goods are scarce. They come from primarily, the other socialist countries. Most grains are imported. No one is starving or near starving -- but some are bored and cranky about the diet. And, most of these ills can be traced back to the big beastie -- the U.S. of A.

The night we arrived and drove through Havana, Marta, one of our guides, pointed to a large square, The Plaza of the Revolution, and said: "This is where we meet with Fidel." A simple sentence. As if you and I were passing Ratner's on Second Avenue and I said: "This is where my mother and I have lunch." Only Marta was saying "we" and "Fidel" as if they were friends who had a lot to say to each other and loved to talk. And of course, that is the case.

Fidel plays basketball twice a week in a public arena near the Plaza in Havana. Anyone can go and watch him. His teammates are members of the Central Committee. They play against high school, university and regional workers teams. They always win. Fidel is over six foot tall, taller than most Cubans. Jim Murray, from Cornell, went to one of the games and says that Fidel cheats. But no one seems to mind.

Anecdote. It's said that Simone de Beauvoir told Haydee Santamaria (one of the few women who fought in the mountains with the Rebel army): "You Cuban women are not liberated at all. Look! Celia Sanchez still cooks for Fidel."

Haydee replied: "If you don't understand the importance of cooking for Fidel, you do not understand our revolution."

Despite all this love, pictures and signs of Fidel are scarce, though there are some. A

A poster might say: Con Cuba con [illegible] dos por la ofensiva revolucionaria [illegible] but these are not abundant. The [illegible] Fidel is a great man, but hardly g[illegible] that we work for him because he works so hard [illegible] We work to emulate him and to please him.

Pictures of Che on the [illegible] where. An isolated bohío [illegible] countryside will have a newspaper [illegible] on the front door. Posters and photos [illegible] where. The most astonishing, perhaps, was a forty-foot cardboard cut-out of Che with a bandaged arm: the way he entered Havana on January [illegible] 1959. It was down the street from the coordinating center of the Havana Green Berets. Naturally, we all took snapshots of it -- posing between the legs, our heads touching his cardboard knee-cap.

Anecdote: On the Isle of Youth, [illegible] island off the Cuban coast where intensive farming communes are being developed, a ten year old girl was excited because we were northamericanos.

"Do you want to travel someday?" asked Sue Orrin.

"Yes," said the girl.

"Where do you want to go?"

She thought a moment. "Bolivia," she said.

"To be like Che?" said Sue.

She thought a moment. "No. To be like [illegible]."

I've always hated hero posters. Or -- at least, I kind of like looking at them in the store, but would never put one on my wall. It seems to me, living in New York or Washington, where everything is ugly and you have to [illegible] half of your visual environment in order to survive, that you have to, therefore, be very cautious about what you hang on your walls, what you look at, wake up to, day after day. So I would never put up a giant picture of Humphrey Bogart [illegible], though I love him a lot. I really don't [illegible] the person I want impinging on my [illegible] every day. Same goes for W.C. Fields, Marlon Brando and the rest. (Though I once had a boyfriend who had the Marx Brothers [illegible] and it was kind of interesting [illegible] neath their feets).

Anyway, it seems to me now that [illegible] heroes in this world. Che is one. [illegible] [illegible] than us -- stronger, [illegible] and that is not a bad thing [illegible] thing to have these [illegible] roousness. We love [illegible], say, James Agee, be[illegible] -- they are our sympathe[illegible] vibration. We love [illegible] better than us. And maybe, if we allow him, his example will spur us on -- make us [illegible] of ourselves. All of this [illegible] to get a great huge pic[illegible] home and hang it on my wall.

[illegible] airplane pilot who fought in the Bambis, [illegible] with Commandante Guevara:

"He was a man of the twenty-first century, yes. He was -- you and I are just you and I -- but he was very special. Of the twenty-first century. He [illegible] thought of himself. He was always thinking about the things around him. The other people. His ideas -- how do you say it? -- were always consonant with his actions. A very great man."

I want to go [illegible] and roam in Santiago, so [illegible] in Che's last published letter [illegible] "I embrace you with all my revolutionary fervor." I would like to say that to you but feel that I haven't earned the right.

Michele

LETTER THREE
Santiago de Cuba
Motel Versailles

Dear Rick,

I am sitting on a porch in the night, looking out over the foothills of the Sierra Maestra, outside the city of Santiago de Cuba which is the largest city in Oriente province in Cuba The mountains are the ones Fidel fought from The province is where he was born Most revolutionary groups, in the past hundred years, have begun (and died) in Oriente It is the easternmost province The people speak Spanish with a special lilt -- rolling their r's louder and longer than the westerners.

Lightning on the horizon. The motel, built after the revolution, is called, strangely enough, "Versailles." We keep asking about this -- joking. "Versailles?" we say. "Versailles? Don't you know what 'Versailles' is?" Our guides, thinking it's a problem in pronounciation, repeat: "Si Bersaiy. Bersaiy." Oh well.

The rest of the group is at dinner. Our third steak and potatoes banquet of the day We spend 1/2 hour of each meal on rolls and water alone. We have all had diarrhea and are all exhausted Those who have stopped their runs, with the aid of wonder drugs, find themselves constipated There is also a sore throat malaise bordering between larynx and sinus that we have been sharing with our Cuban hosts. A golden ant just scuttled across the tiles A motorcycle makes its way up the road

One day this summer you and I were sitting around the dining room table at the S Street co-op and Dennis Livingston came in Somehow we got around to talking about architecture and the new man and Dennis said something about "fascist architecture." He said that art students only studied the monumental death buildings of the ruling classes -- Egypt, Rome, Park Avenue That no one studied huts or bohios or houses where people have actually lived.

I remember I was annoyed at the time, though I didn't say anything -- because it seemed to me that Dennis was confusing size with content That is, I couldn't conceive of a large building being anything but oppressive; so I took his statement to be anti-technological, bucolic romanticism.

But I was wrong. Today we passed the Palace of Justice in Santiago, which is right next door to the Moncada barracks which Fidel tried to storm in 1953 with 200 others I didn't have to ask, I knew right away that this building was constructed before the revolution Though I asked anyway, just to make sure. It was flat. Pale blue With romanesque columns The facade was barren; it seemed almost one dimensional. The windows like blind eyes. A box that went blind I remembered what Dennis had said. It is inconceivable that a revolutionary would design such a building. Inconceivable. After all, buildings are for human beings.

I don't know the technical terms to describe the new buildings in Cuba -- those built since the revolution. But I will try, anyway. Nick Freudenberg, a member of the trip, recently expelled from Columbia, says: "Art criticism shouldn't be written, anyway. It should be music." (But of course I can't read or write music either.)

Case 1: An enormous sugar storehouse at least a city block long and wide. In concrete. A perpendicular semi-circle with support arches along the sides. Very light, and not at all ponderous Inside (having nothing to do with architecture but much with Cuba) a great huge enormous dark cavernous triplex mountain of sugar, at least 100 feet high. Dark brown cane When I first walked in I thought there was nothing there - it was so dark. A child's garden of pleasures. Where the Pied Piper took the Hamlin children "Come in my dear and have a bite," said the witch to Hansel

A hydroelectric plant with all the forms exposed and painted bright primary colors. Prefabricated, airy concrete forms used in the office area. You are always aware of space and spatial changes. Remember that power plant near the Georgetown river which you hate so much because it's just a concrete box of no use or beauty to anyone? You said you wished it were all glass so we could see the forms, or that it were open so we could walk in There's one on

more

110th Street in Manhattan which Nick particularly detests. There's one on Ave A in Manhattan which negates the street and the people who live there. Abajo a corporate capitalism and its uglies!

We asked the workers at this plant what they thought of Che. They told us about a concrete factory in a neighboring town which he had helped build in two weeks.

You asked me to be on the look-out for new forms of family dwellings. There are none. The nuclear family is not being split up (though it is going through monumental changes). So the new homes which are being built are for single families only -- no communal dwellings.

They are concrete. Compact. Tile floors, easy for cleaning and good for cooling. Glass is scarce so the windows are either wooden slats which open and shut with a lever, the old Spanish model, or they are prefabricated forms with wooden shutters behind them.

Cuba is still very poor, you know, and there is a great housing shortage, though they are building as fast as they can. A family of six will have a four room house, and they are fortunate. New homes are given out according to need. The poorest families get first choice.

The Cubans have done some incredible things by way of thrift and beauty. They have had to be very resourceful since the U.S. blockade began An example might be sound-proof paneling that the radio studios made out of discards from the sugar cane. In this motel, as well as in most of the workers' homes we have visited, furniture is made out of wood and basket weave. Basket drawers in wooden frames; basket seats on wooden chairs. If this wasn't Cuba I would steal the wicker lamp shades and mats and bring them home to you. But one simply does not do that in a revolutionary land. Which brings me, haphazardly, to the problem of morality and capitalism.

If I were staying at the Statler Hilton in New York, I would steal everything of value. Anything I needed -- towels, soap, paper and the bedspread, if it was beautiful. I wouldn't even think of it as "theft". Because, after all, the Statler Hilton is owned by two men (Mr. Statler and Mr. Hilton I presume) or a corporation of men -- and they are all rich and I am fairly poor. And I don't owe them anything -- though they, you might say, owe me a lot. So who would I be stealing from? Some men who have a great deal more than me. Whose rapaciousness never takes me or anyone else into account. Did anyone consult me when they built that monstrous new Hilton on 56th Street and 6th Avenue in New York? No. But after all, as an adolescent in love with the city, I used to spend two or three days a week on that block, between the Museum of Modern Art and the Donnell Library. I loved that block, once upon a time, when I still loved New York and went into Whitmanesque ecstasies watching the skyline emerge over the river. Who has the right to decide? The profiteers or the lovers? The lovers of course. The streets belong to the people!

Anyway, that's America all over. There is only my individual decision, my individual morality pitted against Mr. Hilton's or Mr. Statler's. I decide whether or not I should steal from them. In my own mind I have done nothing wrong. In fact, I may even be doing a moral good.

In Cuba, every decision a man makes from day to day involves the collective, the whole. Because everyone is working together to benefit the country and benefit other oppressed people in the world. Every decision is a moral choice and every moral choice is pretty clear. Not so at home. We are at war. Me against Mighty Mr. Statler. Nancy and Nick against Mighty Grayson Kirk. Even if I steal the towels (a criminal is a revolutionary without a program,someone once said), whom do I benefit? Only myself. I am more worthy than Mr. Hilton. That is clear. But still, it's essentially an egotistical act -- politically neutral.

Theft is only one example. Whether I drop out and move to a farm, fly to New Mexico, spend most of my time on drugs -- these are all essentially personal decisions, when one lives in the United States. It's only my ego against everyone else's. Just like Mr. Hilton is only responsible to himself and his stockbroker -- I am only responsible to myself and whomever else I choose.

In Cuba it is quite different. Everyone is responsible for and to everyone else. The profits of a man's labor here are shared equally by all. (If this is not exactly the case now, they are working towards it.) You do not steal from the Motel Versailles because you would be stealing from all the people in Cuba. Granted, this is easier to effect and visualize in a land of 7.5 million; it is still an exciting and important thing, this sense of collectivism.

We met an old man on the street in Havana. He said he was seventy. He was a cigar-roller. We asked him why he didn't retire, since everyone over 65 can do so with a pension. "I'm healthy," he said. "Why should I retire? Besides I rolled cigars forty years for the capitalists -- I want to roll forty years for the Cuban people. I want to die with a cigar in my hand."

We meet three teen-aged boys in Valle Grande, a small new town outside Havana which was built a year ago in 44 days. It is named after the town in Bolivia near which Che was killed. The people who live here now are workers and lived in the worst slums of Havana. Of the three boys, one lived at Valle Grande, two still lived in bad homes in Havana. We asked the boy from the town how he felt about living in a new house. He said, "It is very nice. We lived very badly before. A shack of wood. But I wish my friends could live here too. I wish they would get new homes soon."

This sense of collectivism and generosity pervades the country. And it is not against the individual -- not at all. It is only against the ego-trip.

I guess that's all I have to say today. Except that I want to have long talks with you when I get back about why it is necessary to be a communist, politically, in order to be a communitarian spiritually.

Have you been kicked out of S Street, I wonder? How is the new co-op?

Much love

Michele

LETTER FOUR
Siboney
Oriente Province

Dear Payte,

Pause for breath at Siboney farm where Fidel, along with 200 others, launched an abortive attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953, over a year after Batista came, by coup, to power. Our guide is the father of one of the murdered rebels -- Guitart.

Thinking about the word communism. Cubans are in love with it. The idea. The goal. The word itself. A headline in Granma recently read: "Communism -- More and More and More Communism." But they will be quick to tell you -- a worker, a party member, anyone -- that they have not reached it yet. This often comes up when we ask questions about wage differences. A worker makes 90 pesos a month; an engineer makes 350. But there's not much to buy in Cuba -- food and clothes are rationed. So at this point, a wage gap is not so important. They will say: "And besides, we have free medical services for everyone, free schools; by 1970 no one will be paying rent; we have free public telephones and almost free transportation." The future plan seems to be to make more things free, rather than give more people money. On the Isle of Youth, where intensive farm communes are being developed, they are already experimenting with free movies, cigarettes and clothing. Oh yes, all student textbooks are also free, all over the island. They come with a note which says: "If you can use this book -- take it. If you can use it -- you will amply repay us in the future."

Thinking about meaningful work. One of our friends in Havana is a girl named Lochy. She is a biology student who speaks Russian and English fluently and has spent the past year doing translating and research with a Russian biologist. She will return to school in the fall. She, Nancy Biberman from Columbia, and I went to the National Museum together one afternoon. Later, Nancy said that she envied Lochy. "It seems so great to want to get a job, to want to work.

Like -- I'll be finished with school in a year and then I don't know what I'll do Maybe I'll go to graduate school -- if nothing more interesting comes up Maybe I won't. It doesn't matter. Because any work I do outside of Movement work is just a waste of time It'd be so nice to know what you wanted to do -- to have a sense that your job, your job -- goddamnit -- was important, was part of something important, you know "

As we travel from factory to factory, personalized, psyche-oriented, old Michele keeps asking people, workers and others: Do you like your job? Do you enjoy your work? Would you want to do something else?"

The reply is invariably: "I will do what the revolution needs." Or: "I was trained as an agronomist -- but the revolution needs chemists -- so this is what I do now " Or: "Of course I like this, but if the revolution needed something else I would do that " Or sometimes, I get no answer at all, because it's not a question that Cubans often ask themselves

Their satisfaction comes not exclusively from personal gratification (as ours in the U.S. must come), but from collective gratification. From the sense of building Cuba, giving courage to other third-world movements, working together on whatever is necessary

Everyone in Cuba is working, and working very hard. Cuba needs everything Technicians, translators, scholars, teachers, doctors, laborers. All our guides are both full-time guides and students of language or political science Most of the University students we met, like Lochy, were working simultaneously, in their field. Or they work one year in their field and go back to their studies the next.

Most of the trained personnel left Cuba after the revolution They were middle-class, used to material comforts, and couldn't take the scarcities that the revolution has had to face So, in a sense, the country has almost had to start from the beginning in terms of training A friend of Lochy's who is some kind of co-ordinator for the merchant marine told us: "You see this job I am doing. I am thirty-five This job should be done by a man of experience. A man of sixty But -- we don't have them. So we have to work very hard A man with more experience could do, for example, any job that I do in a Way, while it takes me three days. That is now it is We have no time to rest."

Every person is requested (not required) to do agricultural work for 45 days a year The students go out to the fields together with their teachers. Whole ministries vacate for a month and a half. Even Fidel cuts sugar cane for twenty days a year. It's said he's a very good cutter.

Raul Roa Jr., (whose father is Foreign Minister) told us: "If someone had told me in 1955 that I would be spending a month cutting cane and enjoying it -- I would've laughed in his face. But I'll tell you something - it's a very good thing A man you have never spoken with -- a man who empties the wastebaskets, and you've said hello and that's about it -- well, this man will be your bunkmate for a month. So you get to know him and his family and his troubles. It's very important. It builds consciousness "

Tony, a friend of Raul , a painter and a lieutenant in the army said: "You have to really know what you're doing to cut cane. It is very difficult work The most difficult backbreaking work in the world These campesinos who have done it all their lives -- even they lose a finger once in a while. But they are very fast, very good But if you have never done it, it's impossible Impossible. The first time my twin brother and I did it, we just went along Oh, it was hard. And then we looked up and everyone else -- the ones who grew up in the country -- is far ahead of us. All the way down the line, only we are behind. And we stay behind. And we stay behind. So I say: this is not for me. No. I will do anything else Anything. Peel potatoes. I will not cut cane. So I don't do it. I do something else I load the trucks, anything."

The army, by the way, is very large

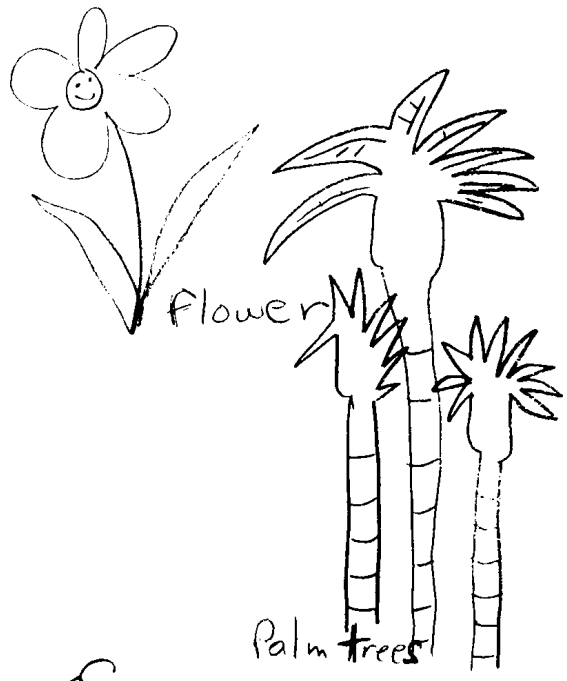
And when it is not doing maneuvers it acts as an agricultural brigade - clearing land, building houses, planting, reaping, etc. Tony paints in every spare moment He studied art in college in the United States. When we met him he was doing some wonderful Lescaux-type paintings of small animals and men -- canvas and oil.

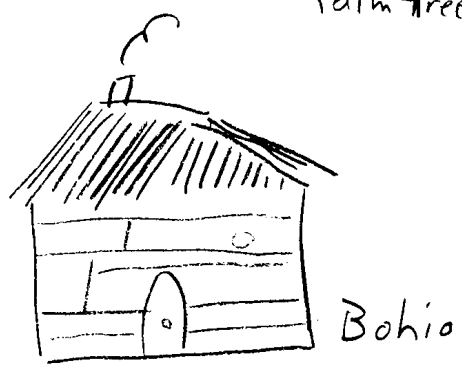
Psychiatrists and M D 's we have spoken with have said that neuroses have increased since the revolution That is not a surprise once you have been here a while The revolution is a process, a ten year process, and has been difficult for everyone. Personal and political changes have swept over the island in great, fast, gulps And the pressure to work is very great The shrinks said that people come to them because they feel they are not doing enough. They feel inadequate for the tasks of the revolution. Different from us who go batty because most work in America is meaningless, vapid and only done for money. A Cuban neurotic, I guess, sees a wealth of activity around him and is afraid he is not capable enough to participate.

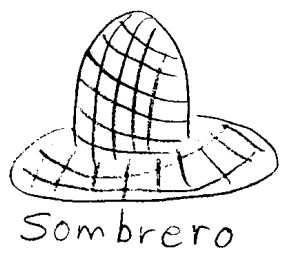
"Revolucion es construir" says a neon sign in Havana. Revolution is construction. It is very beautiful It is not so easy. Wish you were here taking photos of the beautiful slim palms and the hills that resemble Big Sur Another time. Our guides are calling us back on the bus

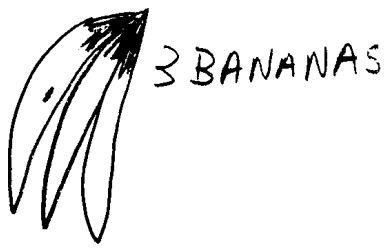
Love love,

Michele









LETTER FIVE
Holguin
On a bench in a square
Heading back towards Havana

To Mungo and the Vermonties,

Across the street a Catholic church is emptying out. Some young boys, around eight or ten, stop and talk with us. We ask them, among other things, if they believe in God. Yes, they do. What do they think of Fidel? They think he is a great man. Do they think Fidel believes in God? Oh yes, they say.

Yesterday we climbed a mountain in the Sierra Maestra. For the fun of it. "Revolution for the fun of it," say the French Situationalists. It was beautifully clear and hot. We carried four clay water jugs. People dropped off along the way, exhausted. A few of us, about twelve, kept going.

After Fidel's attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, when Haydee Santamaria was in jail, they brought her the eye of her brother Abel and demanded that she confess. She said, "If Abel didn't talk when you took that one out, he will not talk when you take out the other." Climbing the Sierra I asked myself these questions in fantasy-land. What would I have done if I were Haydee? What would I have done if I were Abel? I have had these fantasies before.

My sneakers were too tight and I came back with big gashes on my ankles. But I tried not to complain. We got thirsty. Don't ask for help except in extremity. Be staring with the water. What if Batista's army was coming this way? What if this were the only water we would have for days?

It occurred to me, as we neared the first ridge, that our life in the first world, in the U.S., is not one which calls for guerrilla warfare bravery at this time. Our medium now is guerrilla theater - psychic bravery. And that when the time comes when we must be physically brave, use guns, dare death, we will be ready. History will have made us ready. This is not a terribly new idea, but I just became convinced of it -- so thought I would tell you. Haydee, who was one of the few women who fought in the mountains, had asthma. So did Che. Celia Sanchez, who was and is Fidel's right hand lady, was terrified of mice. We'll do all right when we have to.

We came to a valley perhaps fifty feet wide where, you could say, the next mountain began -- though with mountains it's difficult to define boundaries. There was a bohio in the valley, all alone. A bohio is a structure with a thatched roof. It is not considered a house. It is something separate. We asked a woman in Valle Grande, a town outside Havana, where she lived before the revolution. She said: "Not even in a house,' only a bohio." Many people still live in them. I think it is the thatched roof which defines it. For some are made of wood and some of brick.

From a distance this bohio looked so decrepit I was sure it was uninhabited. Nick Freudenberg and I sat on a rock and watched oval bugs colored deep red with black diamonds go about their business beneath a tree. Their diamonds were like designs on American Indian tents. The Indians copied the cosmos. The white man copies himself.

Then we were called to the bohio, where a blond woman about 40 rested a naked blonde boy between her arm and belly. She and her husband have lived in this valley forever, perhaps thirty years. She has raised twelve children here. Only four are still at home. Her eldest son is an engineer in Havana. Three daughters are on the Isle of Youth. Another daughter is at a boarding school; another is sick and being treated in Santiago. Fidel and Juan Almeida used to pass by during the war.

The house had five rooms. Part of the floor was stone and part was dirt. It was incredibly clean and cool. Five tooth brushes hung on nails, baskets of all sizes hung from the rafters. The living room had new furniture - a bench, a table and two chairs made of wood and mat given to them be the revolution. The stove was three piles of coals on an iron and brick platform. Water was boiling. Outside a caged pigeon tried to escape. They were going to eat him for dinner. One of the sons was drying coffee beans in cement corral.

Farmers are not forced to join collective farms, though they are encouraged to do so. A small farmer may grow and eat whatever he wishes -- pigs, chickens, grain, coffee. But he is not allowed to sell any of these foods as a private producer. He has to sell them to the state. Otherwise the black

market would run rampant.

We walked back the easy way, along a stream bed, eating bright yellow mangoes and pulpy white guava.

Later in the afternoon we stopped about twenty miles west at the town of Chivirico, which was built since the revolution. It borders on the sea. The roads are unpaved. All the buildings are new, low and made of cement. Horses stood around troughs; small children waited on line for the bakers to open ; men sat on wooden boxes, drinking coffee and talking, in front of the general store.

We met a very black man there -- a Jamaican, age 64 -- who has lived in the area for forty years. His name was Juan William Mungo. (I thought you would appreciate that). He spoke English, of course, though he said it'd been many years since he used it. He also spoke some French and some Hindustani. When he was a boy in Jamaica his school was half Indian and classes were taught in two languages.

At twenty he was restless and wanted to see the world. He got on board a ship and sailed to Cuba. Where he stayed. He loved the revolution. It had made everyone equal. Black and white the same. They got better prices for their crops, used better machines, had better transportation. He was head of the local ANAP, which is the association of small farmers. Some, he said, had allowed their land to be collectivized into "Granjas." Others, like himself, had kept their own land. He worked it with three of his sons. His eldest son was an engineer in Havana. He told us he didn't care if his sons stayed on the land after he was gone, collectivized it, or went to study in the city.

Before the revolution, he said, people died quickly, because they had to be taken all the way to Santiago on poor roads, in order to get medical attention. Now they had a new hospital on the hill and also a new boarding school. We could see them from where we stood at sea level, by the general store.

Something about his phrasing reminded me of Bahaman spirituals I have heard and I asked him if he were a Christian. "Well," he said,"Yes. I believe in... in something, by god. In something. And you? Are you a Christian?"

"No," I said, "But I do believe in something."

Only a few churches have been closed since the revolution. These are mostly Catholic Churches, which were staffed by Castillian priests, who were actively counter-revolutionary. A friend of Sue Orrin's in Havana was an active Methodist, but she said, "economically and socially a Marxist." She attended the World Christian Student Conference last year in Helsinki. Her husband was a Young Communist and an atheist. It is difficult, however, to get into the Party if you are religious. But it's not impossible.

Anyway, I wanted to tell you about Juan William Mungo because he seemed so wise to me and because his name was Mungo just like yours. It seemed like, if he had asked, I would have stayed and lived on the granja for the next five years, soaking up wise Jamaican-revolutionary vibrations, until I too understood a piece of peace.

How are things in Vermont? I will see you in a month. Bigger and better and more political Farms! love love

michele

@%

LETTER SIX
Hotel Vedado
Havana Cuba

To Margo who has been too long in city pent, as have we all.

We have been in the city of Havana one week now and the glory of the place has worn a little thin. It appears to me now like any other landscape in concrete. Heavy. Sweaty. Dreary, basically. And crowded. Better than New York, of course. Much free seascape to gaze at, trees and gardens; streams of clear, clean, blue sky. Safe to walk late at night in the streets or by the water. Better than San Francisco or Boston. But still and all -- a metropolis.

The Cubans aren't really to blame for this. Imperialism, mainly American, built this city. It is much too large and centralized for a country as small and underdeveloped as Cuba, and so the Cubans are always telling us. One and a half million people live here, out of a total population of 7.5 million. Before the revolution the stores of Havana were packed with American goods and American money. (The peso is still equivalent to

the dollar) The streets were packed with American tourists and ragged, near-starving children begged, when they could, while women sold their bodies to foreign sailors The old story, sad sick song of colonialism The rest of the island was a vacuum No roads or schools or decent homes or hospitals, much less adequate consumer goods Presently, an effort is being made to move people out of Havana The few consumer goods available are sent to small stores in small towns. A local general store in Oriente for example, will have more and better cloth than a store in downtown Havana Urban re-development goes on in Havana, but more new homes and schools are built in other places

The Cubans, beautiful people that they are, are planting forests around the city for recreation and relaxation In the future, some of these trees will be uprooted and re-planted inside Havana and other cities to give more vegetation and beauty to the cement

I wish I could go to the countryside today. Actually it's only my laziness which prevents me. I could have gone out this morning and done agricultural work in the Havana Green Belt (called the Cordon) Every day busloads of Havanans go out to the countryside around the city to work in coffee, bean and fruit fields.

The Cordon de la Habana is a year or two old It was created outside the city from untended and unoccupied farmland to convert Havana from a consumer parasite into a food-producing, self-sustaining area Naturally, it has not made Havana self-sufficient, nor will it ever -- but it is a good step

Some ministries and work-centers empty out on specific days and go out as a group to work the fields Others, those who do not work in large work-centers, or housewives, go out on week-ends, or any other day they choose Buses leave every morning

I want to live in the country when I get home Do political organizing in small rural colleges or small cities The cities are killing us all in the States Everybody knows it The whites escape a few miles into suburbia, the hippies flee further The blacks go on steaming, crowded closer and closer by urban renewal; the streets are filled with knives and billy clubs

Cubans don't have this problem Most of their cities are small and closely surrounded by farmland Agricultural production (especially sugar) is the basis of the economy and there is a continual shortage of manpower Too much work, not enough people. Everyone spends one month to forty-five days doing agricultural work somewhere University students go out for a month with their teachers. The army pitches in. Whole ministries vacate for the fields, leaving a skeleton staff behind.

If anything, Cuba has the reverse problem People want to come to Havana. City people, accustomed to comforts and conveniences, grumble when they are sent to the countryside Again, they are trying to solve this problem The students from the National ARt School this month are taking a show of paintings through the province of Camaguey Provincial ballet companies are being formed. Theater groups travel all the time. All this in order to educate the campesinos and make the city of Havana less important and attractive.

I don't know where you are now -- though I'm sending this letter to NYC Hoping you are on the Maine shore with the puppet theater Hoping I can join you there. Much love,

michele

@*@*@*@**@

LETTER SEVEN
Hotel Vedado
Havana
Cuba - First Free
Territory of America

Jonny -

I am afraid to come home. Though, communications between Cuba and the U S being what they are, you will probably not receive this until I am already in Washington or New York - wherever I end up. Returning is always more perilous than leave-taking. For me, anyway. Who knows what may've happened since I've been gone.

The Democratic Convention. Chicago. Maybe you've been beaten or killed. News from the U S is sparse here and usually not too accurate. If one were to read the Cuban press for a year and only the Cuban press, you might think that the Black Panthers are sweeping the country and armed struggle is on the verge of open warfare in all the black ghettoes of the nation. Not a word about the Ford Foundation subsidizing Black Capitalism, the insidious Urban Coalitions, the hold SCLC still has over the South. So I don't know what's happening at home. We have read in Granma only short and unspecific accounts. And I haven't even mentioned my personal fears -- like who's in love with whom and why in Washington, New York, Portland town. Who is winning the Liberation News Service struggle? Will I have a job when I get home? Will I have a home at all?

We are all this way. A little restless and a little lonely. It's tiring to be a tourist -- even a revolutionary tourist. And, also, the Cubans are overflowing with energy. Everyone involved in their job, in one or two mass organizations, in over-time work, in agricultural work. Poets make films, filmmakers cut cane, translators study to be x-ray technicians. People sleep little and work much. And this energy is infectious. I am infected by it. We all are. And there's no way we can vent this energy while we are here. We want to come home -- come home to make the revolution.

A strange paradox: Cuba has made me both more aware of myself as part of an international anti-imperialist pro-socialist movement and simultaneously more aware of myself as deeply, darkly, irrevocably American, United States of - style.

There are so many examples I could give you of the Cuban feelings of international solidarity -- I don't know where to begin. Certain concepts, feelings, which for us, in the U S., are known and considered by an obscure few on the left -- are household words in Cuba. One of these is "underdevelopement". (Whereas you would never hear of a North American housewife speak of her society as "verging on post-scarcity".) Another is "Solidaridad Con Pueblos" or internationalism.

Anecdote the First: At a cement factory in Camaguey, Jim Murray, from Cornell, who speaks fluent Spanish, asked a group of workers what would they do if they didn't have to work so hard. What would they do if the country was developed and heavy labor was no longer needed. "This is our situation," he explained, "in the United States. Where we are technologically very advanced." It was a puzzling question to them. Some didn't know what to answer. Some said they would study more. But several said, "Well, we would go to other countries. We would fight in Bolivia or Vietnam." One man said: "We would build machines for the Vietnamese."

A Conversation: With Jaime, a baritone in the Cuban National Chorus: "I think the Vietnamese people are first. They are the most revolutionary people in the world. More, even, than the Cuban people. A Cuban is impatient. He wants things -- one day, two days. But those Vietnamese -- they have been fighting for twenty-five years. And they have nothing! Nothing. And yet you always see them smiling

and singing. They are so gentle Yes. I think they are more revolutionary. The Cubans have a lot to learn from them."

Visual Aids: Posters in Havana which say: "The Struggle of the Vietnamese People is the Struggle of All." An electric sign in the main square of Santiago de Cuba with the same words and a map of Vietnam showing which areas were liberated and which still occupied by the Americans.

The Third World exists. It is real. I know it now and I don't think I will ever forget it. I don't think anyone will ever be able to say to me again: "Well, yes, the Vietnamese are being killed and the Indians are starving -- but what can I do about it? I can't do anything. Why should I waste my life trying to do a futile thing?" I mean, of course, people can say this to me But no longer will I easily and resignedly sigh and agree with them. No longer will I say, as I did in the Past: "Well, yes you're right after all. I'm just in politics because of emotional needs If you don't have those needs, why should I push you?"

For one thing, in Cuba it is not a crime to be horrified by the oppression of others and to want to fight to help those oppressed. For another thing, I'm in politics objectively - for outside reasons - Nelson Rockefeller to name one, de facto czar of Venezuela and New York State - as well as for inside, emotional reasons. Because I feel personally oppressed by the lack of people power in the States and because I am distressed by the oppression of others (Not to mention that this oppression is done in my name -- as an American -- which, categorical imperatively, makes me responsible). A man (or woman) who sees these things and does not fight against them is a coward. Has no faith in his own vision or the courage to try that vision out.

Of course it is uncertain. Of course, it may come to nothing in our lifetime But then, what will come to anything? The house in Long Island? The best-selling novel? All these things are as ephemeral as ourselves, as our bodies and the short lives we breathe. The only thing which is really eternal is our vision, and the way we struggle to perfect and effect our vision. That is all. The only thing.

Cubans believe in the power of A Vision. They have seen it happen in their own country. They have seen themselves partake of it. An idea -- a revolution, a new society -- which became a reality. So they have no doubt, though the struggle is long and painful, that good does triumph over evil and can create a world in its own image. A sign in a furniture store in Cienfuegos read:

Guerra contra: Manualistas y Pessimistas

War on manualistas -- on people who go by the book, who don't use their imagination, who rigidly adhere to rules. Pessimistas -- and Fidel often speaks about these in his speeches -- people who do not have vision, who say: "Oh, it can't be done. It's impossible."

Cuba, by its survival, on the spiked boot of imperialism, has proved that the impossible can be done. They plan to harvest 10 million tons of sugar in 1970. They have never done it before. This year the expected harvest was 7.5 million but there was a drought. They only got 5.5 million. When we ask: "How are you ever going to harvest 10 million in 1970?" They say, "I don't know how, but we will."

When you begin to experience the daily life of the third world, you begin to understand how important it is to be a radical in the U.S.A. at this time. "You attack the stomach," a South Vietnamese told us, "we attack the head."

For a long time, we in the movement have secretly bemoaned the fact that we were not born Bolivian, Cuban, maybe Venezuelan. If we were, the fight would be clear, the enemy the ruling class brilliant in its illegitimacy and cruelty. And, while, from time to time I may still bemoan this fact, I don't think I will ever do it as loudly or despairingly as before. True, if I were Bolivian, the struggle would be clearer. But, as Americans, we can be the ulcer in the belly of the beast. Eating away imperialism and capitalism from the inside. I hope. I hope our acids are pernicious enough for the task.

I wish I knew what happened in Chicago. Your companera in the struggle, love love,

Michele

LETTER EIGHT
Coppelia the Giant
Ice Cream Parlor
54 Flavors tambien'
Havana

Jonny again -

A short diatribe on relevance and homesickness. Across the street a Cuban rock band on an open truck goes by with trumpets and percussion urging everyone to come to the Plaza de la Revolucion on September 28 with Cuban flag and sombrero to hear Fidel speak. Children and teenagers run alongside it and behind singing and dancing.

I said to Marta today, "No, I wouldn't want to stay in Cuba." She is one of our guides. "I'm a North American really. I have to go home. Have to make a revolution there."

She smiles and says: "What do you mean, you are not a Cuban? Anyone who is a revolutionary in the world is also a Cuban. We are part of all revolutionary peoples."

Not so, sad to say. Not so, for me, anyway -- and I think most of us in the group feel the same. No matter what I did or how hard I tried I couldn't be a Cuban in this lifetime. Almost twenty-three years in New York have hardly left me a tabula rasa. In fact, sometimes I think there is hardly any rasa left on my tabula.

It's hard to expalin to Marta. I'm terribly provinical. Not my thoughts so much as my needs. My needs have been formed by the U.S. Jewish. East Coast. Alienated. Post-scarcity, almost. Bob Dylan. Consumer paralysis. I don't know how to put it except to say that the armies which war so bloodily inside me do not make so much sense in Cuba.

My homesickness comes to mind again, as the band disappears down the street. I don't like Cuban (Latin) music. It reminds me of old ladies dancing at Grossingers, cha cha cha. I long for Country Joe. Can't help myself.

Marta is twenty-two, like me. Her history is intimately and clearly connected with the history of Cuban society. She knows what it was like before the revolution; she has been part of the revolution for ten years now and she sees Cuba's future as closely intertwined with her own expectations.

Americans living here (there is a colony of about 100 in Havana) are still very much norteamericanos, even if they have lived here ten years. We recognize them as kin by their particular brand of nervous intensity -- more apropos to New York than Havana. They have not been able to become Cuban because they have not shared the historical process. And there's no way that they could share it. No way I could.

Nick Freudenberg (Columbia SDS) says that this is a problem we face in building a collective within the movement. We see ourselves as as a reaction to the post-war history of the U.S. We do not, as yet, see ourselves as clearly part of that history. And this is partly because the history of the U.S. is not monolithic, he says, not as clear in its meaning as Cuban history. People have had radically different maturing experiences. Difficult then to put all the pieces of America together and come up with a cogent analysis or evaluation. No one has done it so far.

A lot of our political concerns, also, are not relevant to Cuba right now. This we knew before we came. But we have since learned in detail what that means. When we first visited the University of Havana and spoke with some of the professors and students, we asked: "Who makes decisions here? Do the students and faculty decide together what should be in the curriculum?"

"No," we were told. "The students do not have much say in curriculum because the teachers know better what should be studied."

Now, of course, if Grayson Kirk said this, and he has, we would storm his office, and we have. But it is a different thing in Cuba where teachers and students both want the same thing. (Faculty and administration are one, by the way). Both want to develop Cuba The whole society wants to develop itself Teachers do not do specialized research in chemical warfare or psychological studies for counter-insurgency. Nor do they prepare their students for this. They do research in better fertilizer, genetic grafting, etc.

Channeling of students exists in Cuba. But the students want to be channeled. And they know why they are working, and for whom. In the U.S. we are channeled so that the profiteers can grow fat - the Kennedys, the Mellons, you know the list. And of course, we are deceived into thinking that this is what we want -- and, further, that it is for our benefit

Questions of structure in an underdeveloped society, where the tasks are clear and the consciousness united, questions like, "Who's in charge here?" are not relevant This doesn't mean they won't be relevant at some future date. At some point students may have to fight to be heard in the university. It may be necessary.

What it means is that the concepts of structure we grapple with in viewing our own society are not, presently, the concepts one would find useful or imperative in Cuba In fact they would probably be a hindrance A Bolivian revolutionary might learn a lot about his country from living in Cuba We would not.

I wrote an article about Liberation News Service for a Cuban magazine but it did not cure me of my restlessness. I want to get back to work. I want to be home, organizing, writing, seeing friends and telling them about Cuba. But it will be another week or two before a boat arrives to take us to Canada

For the first time I see myself as a potential organizer Before I saw myself mostly as a writer or artist, in some way peripheral to the nitty-gritty work of the movement. Now it seems exciting to me to think in political terms, to talk politically - to organize people to take power.

What else can I say? Want another banana split. Cuban ice cream has the highest cream content in the world, in case you're interested. Fidel once spent an hour in a speech discussing the quality of chocolate ice cream -- because there had been some complaints about it. This was a few years ago. They have since solved the problem.

We have received some beautiful books -- speeches of Fidel, writings of Che, Cuba '67, some other things. Wonderful silk-screened film and political posters. Poster art is high art here. No socialist realism to be seen. Some psychedelia, some pop, some other -- all very good. It's a pleasure to pass a billboard which you want to pause in front of, want to look at. We don't buy things here. We get gifts. And I will give some to you and the rest of the Washingtonians when I return. It will feel strange to spend money again.

Love from Havana to Chicago -

Michele

LETTER NINE
Hotel Vedado
Havana

"a lover for your life and nothing more"

Dearest Daniel,

The anniversary of our separation has come and gone. It's now been a year and fifteen days since we lived together. "Feels like a mighty long time..." One of the things, I remember, which used to schiz me out was the dichotomy between my outside, activity-life and my life with you inside the apartment. That I could never seem to make them blend. And since we've been parted I have still not found the solution.

Cubans have similar problems, strange to say Divorces are more common here than marriages -- just like among our friends. It is not uncommon here to be married at eighteen and divorced at twenty. Not uncommon for a twenty-six year old divorcee to have a 10-year old daughter. Marriage and divorce are legally simple and easily available. Not so easy on the head, however. A revolution is a difficult proposition.

I don't know where our fragmentation -- yours and mine -- comes from. Glibly, I would say: Capitalism. But, where in Capitalism? Our inability to hold together comes from the fact that we race, as individuals, as opposed to working as part of a community. And even when we get married, it is still two individuals racing together. Like those three-legged races If the couple has no community to relate to -- how can it stay and grow as a couple? In any case, in Cuba, one can speak clearly about the problems of men and women. One can speak of them politically and socially -- while the situation in the U.S. seems much more unclear to me.

Historically, first. In 1961 10-year-old and 12-year-old girls and boys from the city and the middle class were sent to the countryside to teach the campesinos how to read, write and do arithmetic. This was the first time in three hundred years that a Cuban female was allowed outside her home without a chaperone. And she didn't just walk down the street or drive to a beach. She went to an isolated village or farm and lived with peasant families, ate peasant food, pee-d in peasant outhouses. (Boys of course did this too, but it's women's liberation I'm talking about now.) A girl who, at twelve, taught adults to read and write is not going to want or need a chaperone when she is fifteen or twenty. (By the way, there were still organized counter-revolutionaries at this time in the provinces and they murdered several of the young teachers.)

On the other hand, though chaperones are obsolete and such topics and birth control and menstruation easily discussed among young men and women, young people are, on the whole, not so sophisticated as we. Sex before marriage is not a common thing, and most students seem to be wary of it. Many schools have strict regulations about the separation of sexes. However, people have told us that these regulations are more honored in the minds of the mothers than the lives of their daughters.

Jim Murray and Larry Kramer, both from Cornell, spent a week doing agricultural work with a group of 20-year-old university students The men live separated from the girls --separated by miles, working on different crops. Once a week there is a party. Jim and Larry said that the day before the party there was an air of excitement in the bunks such as we used to know in high school. Everyone is talking and thinking and planning for the evening. A lot of giggling and guffawing goes on. It is a big Event.

There is more to say about the emancipation of women since the literacy campaign. Often, you see, Cuban men are not so elated by their liberated wives. An educated young woman may not want to stay home and raise ten children. She is a good revolutionary. She wants to go out and work -- to be a technician, a teacher, an architect And maybe, her husband is also a good revolutionary, but clings to the old ideas about a woman's place. Friction. Fracas. Divorce. And so it goes

There is a lot of work to do in Cuba. The more excited and loyal to the revolution you are the more work you want to do. A husband and wife, if both are working, may see each other only sporadically. They are needed at their jobs A wife, for example, is a translator. Her husband is an agronomist. He is called away for

two weeks to help out on a farm in Camaguey. When he returns she is working 18 hours a day translating a new and important textbook that has just come from England. An old Jamaican we met in a mountain town told us: "These young people are busy. They do not even talk about love. No. They have only time to love the revolution. Everything is revolution with them."

Women are encouraged to work. At first, at the beginning of the revolution, they set up nurseries and no one came. Now it is all they can do to staff new nurseries, the demand is so great and the waiting list so long.

Lochy LeRiverend, a biology student, age 23 and mother of a three year old daughter, told us: "When I first divorced I felt horrible. I thought no one will want me anymore. I am no good. And it's true, you know, many Cuban men think a divorced woman is very low. That's how they think. But my friend Manolo took me aside and told me that I needn't feel this way. That this was an old attitude and a divorce means nothing to a real revolutionary. It is just one of those things which happens. Then I became much happier. Now I am happy all the time."

Lochy, by the way, was elected by the biology students at the University to go to Expo "67 as a guide. She is not a very pretty girl. When Nancy Biberman and I first met her and she told us that she had been a guide at Expo both of us, inwardly, were surprised. Remember how, when we went there last summer the guides in most pavilions were movie starlet types, frustrated models and actresses? Lochy, you see, is intelligent, funny, honest and a whole bunch of wonderful things. You would like her. But she wasn't pretty. In Cuba, it is not so important to be pretty, to dress a certain particular way, to have the most beautiful body. In Cuba it is consciousness that counts.

There are, however, dangers threatening this emphasis. One example is the magazine Mujeres, published by the FMC (Federation of Cuban Women). It is a kind of poor man's version of Glamour or Mademoiselle, with articles on five new ways to do your hair, what's in style for the kiddies this year, etc.

The perilously thin line between dumpy socialist women in overalls (1930 photos from the USSR) and Parisian Chique is going to be a hard one for the Cubans to maintain. Whenever we meet a group of women, we ask them about the emphasis we have seen in Mujeres. We ask men too. They usually say, "A woman should take care of herself. We think a woman should always remember she's a woman." These things are not bad in themselves -- but our knowledge of how consumer culture dominates and tortures North American women has made us wary.

Presently, there is too much work and too few consumer goods for this kind of emphasis on woman-as-beautiful-object to be dangerous. I don't know what the future will hold.

Don't know what the future will hold for me either, or for you. Think they will be separate futures. You think so too. In any case, we are part of a world=wide young divorcee movement, which is somehow comforting to know.

much love, michele

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LETTER TEN
HOTEL VEDADO
Havana

Dear Cathy,

A note to the Women's Liberation Group. Sad to say, there's also a lot of male chauvinism running loose in Cuba, though it's called "machismo" here and has ancient, particularly Castillian, traditions.

Only women, for example, work in the day nurseries. Why? we ask. A woman by nature has more patience and kindness we are told. It is her kind of job. The FMS, which is primarily an organization of housewives, considers part of its function to be counseling potentially delinquent children. It's a woman's job. If the child then turns into a full-fledged delinquent, the men take over. Crap.

Not much effort is being made to teach men patience or gentleness or all those other traits for which women are world-renowned. A woman in Cuba then, is still held responsible for two jobs -- home and children plus a vocation

There are some economic reasons for this, which partly excuse and partly explain There's much heavy labor to build schools Cutting cane is backbreaking for a man -- and therefore deemed impossible for a woman So because of the needs of the society, it is important that the men be freed for the heaviest tasks.

University educated, young and very revolutionary men, occassionally tell us that they do share the housework and children with their wives But this is the exception Mostly, from what we have witnessed, the men are quite content (and the women too.) to leave the heavy home work to the women

In our own group of Americans there are only one or two men who really groove on six-month old Chevara Orrin, Sue's baby Only one or two who spend lots of time carrying the baby and playing with her Sue has been having some special probblems For one thing -- most of the Cubans call her the "madre de Chevara' which can be upsetting if you conceive of yourself (as Sue certainly does) as a human being who is also a mother

Last night, she bitterly divided the world into liberals, radicals and revolutionaries in relation to the baby Liberals, she said, give Chevara token pinches on the cheek, occassionally remark that she is a groove, hold her for three or four minutes once in a week Radicals spend more time with her, sometimes take her away during a meeting in which Sue is involved, do not return her to Sue as soon as she begins to cry

She says there are no revolutionaries on this trip And that, in fact, she doesn't know anyone who is advanced enough, baby-wise, in the States to be called one A revolutionary, she says, would not treat the baby as Sue's private property Would treat the baby as a communal charge, love and burden. Would help wash diapers. Would help in feeding Would, attitudinally, partake of the baby on equal terms with Sue

She's right, I think, in defining these differences And it's true that none of us have been revolutionaries with the child To excuse some -- especially the young men -- I would say that it's a very rare 19-year-ole who has any contact with babies, and therefore most of them are quite terrified of the prospect

Watching Sue on this trip, the first time I have ever spoken at length with her, has made me realize several things.

The first is that I would not want to have a baby without having a man who was going to stay with me. I have never felt that way before. Often, in my daydreams, I have had the child alone -- because I wanted it -- and we lived somewhere quite happily without a father But a baby takes up great gobs of time and energy, takes, as they say, a lot out of you, takes patience. I admire Sue's courage, but don't want to do it that way myself This doesn't mean I won't end up a single parent -- it just means that the difficulties of that position are much more clear to me now.

Another thing. I think it is lonely for Sue to be the only one around who knows what it's like to be a mother. Women in the movement are beginning to have babies. I know women in several cities who are pregnant. But all of them are isolated. Off-hand, I can't think of even two radical women I know in the same city who are pregnant. (Though of course, I hardly know everyone.) All the expectant mothers are alone in their expectations

Our lives are unstable, our loves uncertain They have to be, for the most part, because we are young and because we want to create something bigger than ourselves, want to create a revolution. If the movement doesn't begin to treat children as communal cares we are going to have a lot of sad and bitter (and probably politically ineffectual) women among our friends People have said this before But as a group of us is passing twenty, the problem is beginning to grow large.

In Cuba, the burden is somewhat lifted from women. Day nurseries are springing up as fast as they can be adequately staffed. Communal laundries are another new project. The meal burden is lifted because working men eat two meals at their job, and children in school also receive at least lunch and a snack, sometimes all three meals. We have got to be able to do the same in the States, in the movement. And we have got to begin to speak to women about consumer oppression, life-style and the particular

ways in which capitalism dominates their lives as females I know, again, that we have been talking about this for at least a year, all over the country. But suddenly I feel its urgency.

Outside it is raining The hurricane season, they tell me, is about to begin We will return by Cuban freighter to Canada as soon as a boat appears in port That might be tomorrow or a week or a month from now. Some people are flying to Madrid and from there back to the States. But this is more expensive.

How was the Miss America Pageant disruption?

much love, michele

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LETTER ELEVEN
On the malecon
(waterfront)
Havana

Dearest Bob and Sally,

When I came to Cuba, a very long month ago, I thought I was going to see "a socialist country." I didn't know what that meant; which is why I wanted to come. My vaguely formed expectations were static. I was not really prepared to deal with a country which ten years ago had a revolution and seven years ago became avowedly socialist.

The night we arrived we were hysterically exhausted and hysterically exhilierated. Nick Freudenberg, a Columbia SDS'er on this trip, said as we unloaded our suitcases from the bus: "Coming to Cuba is like fucking for the first time. You've read about it and thought about it and wondered about it -- and then when you do it -- it's very different and very real and you have nothing to compare it with." That's how it's been for us here. Sometimes it has been difficult. Hard to see ourselves as first world people and understand what that means. Hard to divine what we can and can't learn from Cuba. Hard to understand exactly what has been happening on this island.

Revolution is a process. Lif too. But revolution is intensified life. Life to the infinite degree. Fidel, you know, wasn't a communist when he was in the Sierras Marx was Frank Pais and he was murdered in Santiago in 1958.

Last night Raul Roa Jr and his friend Tony (a painter and lieutenant in the army simultaneously) told us stories about what happened to them after the triumph on January 1, 1959. Both of them had been active in the student movement and both were exiled in the United States the day Batista fled the country Raul was in New York. Tony and his twin brother Patricio were in Florida.

Raul was invited to speak on the Barry Gray show. And, on that show he assured the audience that the revolution would make foreign investments even more welcome in Cuba "I thought, you know, communism was very bad, no free speech. I thought like everybody else at the time. I still have that tape of the television show. I play it now sometimes for myself. It is very very embarrassing."

Tony is from one of the oldest, wealthiest Castillian families in Cuba. He told us. "So when the revolution triumphed, I thought: Hooray I can go home. It is over. I went home. And went back to my country club. Then I was a good revolutionary and argued with my old friends at the club -- defending Fidel And then one day a friend of mine said: 'You can't be a revolutionary and be in the club at the same time.' So I left the club."

This is how it's been. Cuba became socialist; Fidel became socialist when they realized that private gain was the enemy and centralized planning the only way to secure the revolution.

I have learned something here about leadership. Fidel's the teacher of the Cuban people In SDS we are leery of leaders. For us, anyone in command or in power is, almost of necessity, on a personal ego-trip. So we are careful not to create leaders; and if by accident we do create them, we are careful not to pay them any attention or obedience. And it's true, in the Movement as well as in America at large -- a leader is a person on a private power-hungry ego trip.

However, there's another concept of leadership which the Cubans try to practice, which has just become clear to me. That is this: a leader

is a person who cares terribly and deeply about the people he is leading. Who sacrifices much personal pleasure in order to help, work with, direct, the people who need him. (Che could have remained a middle class doctor in Argentina, catering to his asthma and living to a ripe old age.) A good leader has great strength and compassion and love. Authority is not the same as authoritarianism.

We--the SDS folk--had no leader on this trip, though we could have used one. We often acted selfishly with the gifts the Cubans gave us--posters and books, mainly. We excluded people in the group--or one group excluded another--rather than striving to be open to all. Capitalism has taught us to be selfish. Taught us that if you don't win, you lose. (My parents often refer bitterly to my SDS work and ask, "When are you going to do something for yourself?") Unanchored in a sea of new socialism, we reverted to old patterns; despite the fact that most of us have lived "groovy, alternative life-styles" for many years.

Sally said, just before you both left for Albuquerque, that the New York leftist, hip, artistic scene was the most competitive one she had ever lived through. Shd said, "Everyone throws around his disharmony and calls it righteous!" She was right, I think. And I take it as a heavy condemnation of us all. But lately I have seen us, myself included, as victims--all of us victims of U.S. capitalism. The fact that we see where our oppression lies, shows that there is some hope for us--personally and politically.

The Cuban revolution might be called a speed-reading course in personal growth. Ten years of this course has changed people incredibly. For instance, Jaime, a part-time guide and full-time baritone singer, told me that he was very shy and isolated as an adolescent. The revolution came. Later the October missile crisis. He wanted to join the militia. He lived in a barracks with a gun and fellow militia-men during the October mobilization. He had to spend a lot of time with others. He changed. He grew less afraid. Also happier. This is just one example.

In Cuba the rewards of the society, being elected to the Party, getting a special citation or a few extra days vacation--go to those who are unselfish and non-competitive. Go to those who help out their fellow workers and are good workers themselves. In the U.S., of course, it is just the reverse. No wonder we are all diseased.

But I come home feeling very skeptical about our potential for personal change and growth within our alternative communities.

My own finale to this trip is totally individual. No one else among us doing it. I am reading Philip Kapleau's Three Pillars of Zen. If my radical ways will not bring me peace, someday I will have to follow another road. I won't ever stop being political--that's another imperative Cuba has taught me, which, I think, I will not forget. But I feel very much the need to find an auxiliary thought, life pattern to save my head from destruction. In any case, I look forward in two or three hundred years to the eventual re-unification of Buddha and Karl Marx. They have much to offer each other.

michele

LETTER TWELVE
Hotel Ingles
Madrid, Spain

Beautiful Margo,

Very strange thing. I have flown across an ocean to a continent I never visited; tomorrow I fly back in the direction from which I came. I am here, in Europe, and have no desire to see the place. Want to come home. Get back to work. Make the revolution. I am an American after all, always was, always will be.

Driving from the airport to downtown Madrid was like driving from Kennedy airport to Midtown, only it is sunnier here. Highway much like ours; apartment buildings just like Queens; Coca-Cola and mouthwash advertised side by side.

Strange to hear Spain's Spanish which sounds, rhythmically, like English. Strange

more...

to address a busdriver as "senor" instead of "companero." Strange to spend money again, smoke Marlboros, feel cold in the shade, see stores stuffed with merchandise.

There are four of us who couldn't wait for the Cuban freighter and so took a ship. This afternoon we had lunch in a small restaurant. I was wearing a pin with a Cuban flag on it. Tom asked the waiter: "Do you know what flag that is she's wearing?"

The waiter, a man of about 50, looked at it and said, "No."

"Bandera Cubana," said Tom.

"Ah!" said the waiter as I handed it to him. "Bandera Cubana! In my house I have flags--many flags. From Puerto Rico, from Brazil. Many flags. And I have a special one. But I keep it under the table. Under the table. It is a red one.

"In Spain we don't talk about these things. Shhh. Nothing. Under the table. Hunger. In India. We don't talk about those things here." He pinned the flag inside his lapel and invited us back for supper.

This saved us from total tourist despair. In fact, it made us rather happy.

What cold winds are breathing in the States? We hear HUAC is on the loose again and Dick is humping Hubert. O dear. It looks like Chicago made SDS into a name brand. We see it touted in Time and Newsweek on sale in English in Madrid kiosks.

Everything is weird. Is the repression coming? Am I afraid? I will be home tomorrow and will kiss you then.

love

michele

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